

and this is how it goes by darlingargents

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Genre: Angst with a Happy Ending, Blood, Bullying, F/M, Homophobia, Homophobic Language, Implied Sexual Content, Internalized Homophobia, M/M, Minor Violence, Misunderstandings, Multi, Period-Typical Homophobia, Polyamory, Post-Season/Series 02, the author has a weird obsession with obsession in characters, the author has included these things and does not know whether it is detrimental. lmk i guess, the author likes the Vibe of bloody knuckles and bloody kisses

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Summary:

It goes like this: Nancy's kiss tastes like hope, and Steve's kiss tastes like blood.

and this is how it goes

Author's Note:

i'm in the middle of other more pressing writing projects but this idea would NOT leave me alone. so here it is. shoutout to rie (Val_Creative on ao3), because their fantastic mileven/byler fic [Not Once, But Twice](#) provided the inspiration for adding the background byler in this, which also impacted the plot in some ways that will become obvious upon reading this.

also, you may notice that some things do not align with s2 canon. this is because i started writing it when i was maybe two episodes in. i saw a gifset of the jancy kiss and made assumptions that turned out to be wrong. i changed it a little once i finished the season, but probably not as much as i should have. anyway. s2 is mostly canon in this, it just happened slightly differently. i don't think there are any major spoilers? but there are definitely some. fair warning.

also... yeah, please read the tags, this could be fairly triggering. but it does have a happy ending.

(some timeline notes in the endnotes)

EDIT: now with a fantastic playlist with cover art, also by rie Val_Creative, which you can listen to [here](#) and which I am in love with!

It goes like this.

Steve and Nancy break up because Nancy won't say she loves him, and because she wants Jonathan. When he kisses her, it's sudden and surprises even him, and she's trembling like a leaf, and her mouth tastes like hope. He kisses her over and over and over, and when they finally fall asleep, curled together in an unfamiliar bed, he feels the tightness in his chest every time he looks at her start to unravel.

It goes like this.

Steve punches Jonathan in the face behind the school during lunch. And while Jonathan is still recovering from the blow, a hell of a bruise rising under his left eye and blood running out of his nose, Steve kisses him. Steve is the only solid thing in the world; everything else is tilting.

This kiss tastes like blood.

Steve pushes him away moments later, mouth slick and red, and spits on the ground, wiping off Jonathan's blood. "I'm not a fucking queer," he says, and leaves Jonathan alone. In the distance, the normal high school break-time sounds are coming back into focus. They'd disappeared when the bloodlust, or maybe just lust, appeared in Steve's eyes.

Jonathan licks the blood off his teeth and leans back against the brick wall, pressing his palms flat against it. It's cold and rough against his fingers.

It doesn't feel as real as Steve did when his tongue was in Jonathan's mouth, but it's close.

It goes like this.

Jonathan and Nancy aren't really dating. Not yet. But he still tells her after the kiss, when she's lounging on his bed with a pile of homework after school. Her eyes grow wider and wider at every word, and when Jonathan finishes, she looks away, her painted nails digging into her palms.

"I left him," she says softly, "because I wasn't getting what I needed. But also because I want you, too, and I couldn't reconcile that. But *he* wants you."

"He doesn't," says Jonathan. "He punched me."

“He kissed you.”

Jonathan shrugs. It was a way to humiliate him. He hadn't told Nancy, but Steve had put a note in his locker after. Calling him a queer, a freak, worse things that he didn't want to think about. Jonathan had ripped it up and flushed it down the toilet.

It had been the first time he'd ever kissed a boy. He'd known he liked them for a long time. But it had been the first time.

He would just have to live with the fact that it had been a horrific experience for the rest of his life.

“He doesn't like me,” he says, instead of telling Nancy anything else. She still believes that Steve is a good person, and Jonathan is sure that he mostly is. He just hates Jonathan, and he's not going to force Nancy to see just how much.

It goes like this.

Nancy and Jonathan are publicly dating, but it doesn't matter. According to most of the school, he's a queer. He's a target. He gets used to notes in his locker and hiding in bathroom stalls to change for gym class. It's fine. He's always been a target; this is just a new way they've found to hurt him.

He tries to ignore the fact that he's never told a single person that he likes boys, but Steve somehow figured it out anyway. Somehow, Steve fucking Harrington crawled right inside him and pulled out the secret closest to his heart, the one that holds him together and keeps him safe, leaving him bleeding out. Sometimes he pictures the blood on Steve's knuckles after the punch-kiss and imagines it's his lifeblood, from when Steve pulled the secret out of him.

Sometimes he imagines Steve licking the blood off his hand and smiling at him, lips and teeth dripping bloody and red.

Some nights, after he thinks of that while trying to sleep, his imagination goes further, and he wakes up in the night gasping for breath and desperately hard. He only lets himself think of Nancy, but

after, his mind goes back to the blood.

He can never escape it. The kiss and the blood and Steve are bound together in his mind. Every time he thinks of one, the others will be there.

Somewhere in his ribcage is a lodged spike of desire and anger and regret. He forces it out of his thoughts, and when he kisses Nancy, he's almost never thinking of a dripping red fist and a broken smile.

It goes like this.

Will tells him and Joyce that he has a boyfriend.

Jonathan is frozen as Will trembles like a leaf, explaining that Mike is also dating Eleven, and that he's not, but they're close friends and both okay with the situation. After he finishes speaking, he's pale and wrung-out looking, and Joyce jumps up and pulls him close, telling him that it's okay and that she still loves him, no matter what, you should bring over Mike and El for dinner, we can make their favourites, I'm sure I have some Eggos somewhere...

Jonathan probably would've stayed on the couch, where he'd been when Will sat them down, for another hour wrestling with his thoughts, but then Will looks at him. Questioning. Worried. Wondering if he's upset. He pushes down his emotions. For Will, he won't let them be relevant. He's not going to give Will any reason to think he'll hurt him the way he was hurt, even though Will doesn't know about that — he's never told anyone about the notes.

"I'm proud of you, Will," he says, standing and pulling Will into a short hug. "I'm really proud."

It goes like this.

Will gets his locker vandalized and so does Mike. They both get notes shoved into their lockers, the same tone and content as the ones Jonathan got. The only difference is, Jonathan never told a soul. Will

comes home crying, with Mike by his side, his furious and protective boyfriend holding him tight. Mike tells Joyce with enraged detachment what had happened, and she tells Jonathan later that night, through tears, though she'd mostly used them up earlier.

Jonathan reads the notes. They hurt, but worse, they're familiar. More than similar to his notes; almost identical. Down to the handwriting.

His stomach drops to his feet when he realizes exactly how similar they are, and he pulls one of them out of his bedside drawer to compare. He stopped getting rid of all of them; they're a reminder now, to stop thinking about Steve and blood when he's turned on. It hasn't worked much yet, but he's not giving up on it.

He compares them. Holds them up next to each other. Different words, slightly, but the same tone; the same message.

And the same handwriting. No doubt about it.

Jonathan isn't even in high school anymore; this is the first fall that he hasn't gone back to school. He's working full-time, trying to save up enough for community college. He'd accepted the fact that he'd kept getting the notes even as he entered his senior year and Steve went off to do the same thing as Jonathan later would — saving up for college — because the punch and humiliating kiss had made it clear that Steve had a special grudge against him. But he hadn't thought it would extend to his little brother. Or the boyfriend of said little brother, who was also the younger sibling of Steve's ex-girlfriend.

He couldn't imagine anyone being so cruel.

He didn't want to ever see Steve again. But if he could stop the notes... if he could protect his brother...

He'd do far more than talk to Steve Harrington again. This would be nothing.

It goes like this.

When he sees Steve again, he's been mentally preparing, but nothing could fully prepare him for it.

Hawkins is a small town, but they'd managed to avoid each other almost entirely since that day behind the school. A few small encounters here and there, but not many, and it's easily been several months, maybe even a year.

Steve doesn't look all that different, through the window outside of the auto repair shop where Steve's been working. And that's what gets him.

He doesn't let his fury control him, doesn't punch the window or walk away. He strides into the shop and right into the garage, ignoring the irritated shouts from the receptionist. Steve is talking to a customer, grease smudges all over his white tank top and his chest and arms.

Jonathan tries to speak, but the words seem caught in his throat. A moment later, Jonathan glances over at him, and his eyes widen with an emotion that Jonathan isn't sure of but can only really describe as fear.

He better be fucking afraid, Jonathan thinks.

No one hurts Will. Never again.

"Harrington," he says. Steve's mouth thins into a hard line, and he looks away from Jonathan back to customer.

"Thanks for your business. Our receptionist can write you a receipt." He nods at the customer in farewell and walks over to Jonathan.

"What is it?"

Jonathan swallows against the sudden lump in his throat. "We need to talk."

Outside, he shows Jonathan the notes. Will's, and his. He tries to keep his hands from shaking with anger as Jonathan looks them over with a detached glance and then looks back at him.

“What does this have to do with me? I’m sorry your brother’s being bullied, but maybe you should talk to the school—”

Jonathan thought he was upset before, but rage flares in his chest and his hands tighten into fists, crushing the papers. It’s all he can do not the drive his fists into Jonathan’s face. Reverse their positions. Let his knuckles taste Jonathan’s blood, this time. He manages to hold back.

“Fuck you, Harrington.”

Steve’s expression goes hard and furious. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Byers. Seriously. What does this have to do with me?”

Jonathan throws his note at Steve. “You wrote this.”

For a moment, Steve just stares at him. Then he looks down at the note, and back up at Jonathan.

“What? Why would you think that?”

“Because the first fucking one showed up right after you kissed me. Did you really think I was too stupid to put two and two together?”

Steve’s expression moves so fast that Jonathan almost can’t follow it. Through sadness, and shock, and regret, and landing on anger. “I don’t know why you started getting notes then. But I didn’t write them. And I didn’t tell anyone. Maybe it was just shitty luck and someone saw us.” He shoves the note back at Jonathan, who catches it with numb hands. “And I sure as hell didn’t write any notes to your brother or Mike. I wouldn’t do that.”

He turns to go inside, but pauses to look back at Jonathan. Something in his brain has frozen, and he doesn’t think he can move properly just yet, but he manages to make eye contact with Steve.

“I don’t have a problem with... with this shit, okay?” Steve says quietly. “I don’t.”

He turns back away, and his words are so quiet Jonathan almost doesn’t hear them.

“I lied that day. I’m sorry about that.”

Then he goes back inside, leaving Jonathan alone and shaking.

It goes like this.

Jonathan tells Nancy the whole story. Her mouth grows tighter and tighter as he goes through what happened, from the kiss to the notes to Will to the day he confronted Steve. By the end, her mouth is a line of anger, and he can’t look her in the eyes.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” she asks, voice carefully even. Jonathan closes his eyes for a brief moment.

“Because I didn’t want to hurt you? Because I knew you still cared about Steve, and didn’t want to ruin your opinion of him? I don’t know. I fucked up. I’m sorry.”

“All while you thought he was... shit.” She covers her face with her hands. “I could have told you.”

“Told me what?”

Nancy sighs. The anger seems almost gone now, replaced by sadness. “That he likes boys, too. That he would never leave those notes. I thought I told you, when you told me that he kissed you, but I guess you didn’t realize that I knew for sure. He told me once. And made me promise not to tell anyone.”

She takes his hand, squeezing it tightly. “I’m upset that you didn’t tell me. But I understand. I should’ve been clearer.”

“It’s fine.” There’s a faint buzzing in Jonathan’s head. He’s not sure one person can have this many system-shocking revelations in such a short time; it doesn’t seem healthy. Or safe.

“Are you okay?” Nancy asks.

“I’m fine,” Jonathan says. “But I think I might have been in love with Steve this whole time.”

Nancy makes a sound like she's choking.

It goes like this.

Jonathan knows that it's fucked up. He knows there must be something wrong with him. But Nancy doesn't agree.

"It's understandable. We all went through that whole mess with Will and El and the lab, more than once," Nancy tells him. "It brought you and me together. Why not you two?"

It makes sense, Jonathan supposes. It still feels wrong, in some ways.

But when Nancy told him, her voice quiet and her face pressed into Jonathan's shoulder, that maybe a part of her was in love with Steve ever since they were dating, it felt like something coming together. Something clicking into place. Something that was always meant to be, aligning perfectly. So close to the endgame, the perfect combination.

He realizes that they both want Steve too. And he wanted both of them, at one point.

Maybe this can work out.

It goes like this.

Nancy wears her nicest clothes that aren't for church or a school dance, and Jonathan tries to make sure his hair isn't a disaster. And they go to the tiny house Steve is renting, hand in hand.

It goes like this.

Steve says yes.

It goes like this.

When Jonathan wakes up the next morning, they haven't left Steve's house. He's on his side, facing Nancy, who has Jonathan's arm wrapped around her waist and her hands up next to her heart. Steve's fingers just barely touch Jonathan. They're both still asleep.

Jonathan smiles. He sees Steve move, blinking awake and looking over Nancy's head at him, and sees Steve reach out to pull him closer, but by the time he's even closer and they're entangled hopelessly, he's already asleep again.

It goes like this.

Jonathan tells Joyce the whole story, the same thing he told Nancy, with an addition at the end of his current relationship. She takes his notes to the school principal, along with Will's and Mike's, and shouts down the principal until he looks into the situation. They're not sure they'll ever find out who it was, or why he targeted the two Byers brothers specifically, but they think it will stop. That's enough for Jonathan.

Will, Mike, and Eleven are happy for them, although none of them are fond of the new-relationship increase in PDA. After El finds Jonathan and Steve kissing in the bathroom during one of the typical massive Byers-Wheeler-Hopper-Harrington family dinners, they agree to tone it down.

Early in, on one of Steve and Nancy's visits, Joyce takes Jonathan aside. He's worried, for a moment. That maybe she thinks there's something wrong with her, that both of her sons are dating other boys; that she thinks she failed as a mother. He's prepared to console her, and feel the acidic taste of failure gnawing into him.

Instead, she just hugs him so tight he almost can't breathe. "I'm so sorry," she says. "I'm sorry you thought you had to keep this a secret. And that you couldn't be happy sooner because of it."

To his surprise, tears start to form in his eyes, and Jonathan blinks

them away. “Mom,” he says, but he’s not sure what else to say. She cups his face in her hands.

“You don’t have to hide who you are, Jonathan. Not ever again. Okay?”

“Yeah,” he says, and then he’s crying.

In the car, on the way back to Steve’s house for the night yet again, Nancy asks him what happened. He can tell she’s expecting the worst, and so is Steve.

He just smiles.

“Nothing happened. It’s fine.”

He kisses her, and leans over where she sits in the centre of the front seat to kiss Steve in the driver’s seat. They both still look a little concerned, but they relax a little when they see his expression.

Nancy takes his hand. “I’m glad.”

He smiles even wider.

“Me too.”

Steve turns the car, pulling into his driveway, and Jonathan looks at the house, this tiny little box that became his second home so quickly.

“I’m glad,” he says quietly. “I’m glad I’m home.”

Author's Note:

timeline notes, because i'm not sure how clear it is:

jancy kiss happens during canon.

steve/jonathan kiss happens probably like... just after the main plot of s2, early november, before the snow ball.

mike and will start dating in fall (probably

september-ish) of '86, two years after the events of s2. by that point, steve has been out of high school for a year, and jonathan and nancy graduated at the end of the previous school year. idk if they're actually the same age in canon, but they are in this fic.

steve works for his dad in an auto repair shop. idk if they ever said what his dad did, but in this fic it's auto repair, because that's the only profession i really associate with dads. he does go to college eventually, he just saves up some money first.